India remains ready to respond to the urgent needs of the Iraqi people for stability, security, political progress and economic reconstruction. Were there be an explicit UN mandate for the purpose, the Government of India could consider the deployment of our troops in Iraq.

In the meanwhile, Government of India is ready to contribute to the restoration of infrastructure, medical, health, educational, communications and other civilian needs of the Iraqi people. As a concrete gesture of our support to the Iraqi people, we are already planning to set up, jointly with Jordan, a hospital in Najaf in Iraq."

(c) Some countries, mainly part of the Coalition have sent their troops to Iraq.

Bus service between Gangtok and Lhasa

470. SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:
SHRI N.R. DASARI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Government of Sikkim has sent a proposal to start a bus service between Gangtok and Lhasa in view of the fact that border trade through Nathula Pass in Sikkim is proposed to be started; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) No.

(b) Does not arise.

Sino-Indian rapprochement

471. DR. M.N. DAS:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Russia has welcomed Sino-Indian rapprochement after the Prime Minister's visit to China;

(b) if so, whether India, China and Russia have now agreed to have a joint meeting to play a greater role in world affairs;

(c) if so, the main issues discussed in this regard by Government with China and Russia;

(d) to what extent all the three countries have agreed to implement the decisions taken; and

(e) whether all the three countries have now agreed to work together on economic, social and political issues jointly?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) The Government of the Russian Federation have not commented on the visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister to the People's Republic of China.

(b) to (e) An informal lunch on meeting of the Minister of External Affairs with his Chinese and Russian counterparts was held in September 2002 in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session. They discussed issues of mutual interest. It has been agreed that the three Foreign Ministers will meet again this year in the same format.

Caution to India on joining USA led force in Iraq

472. SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has been cautioned that they should not join USA led force in Iraq;

(b) if so, whether all the opposition parties in India have intimated that any position contrary to the resolution of Parliament would be an "infringement of its privilege";

(c) whether Washington has offered India representation on a proposed joint task force to run the command-and-control structure of stabilization forces;

(d) if so, whether India has accepted this demand; and